

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

S E C R E T STATE 289687

EXDIS

FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE FROM DACCA NOV 26:

QUOTE S E C R E T DACCA 6007

EXDIS

DEPT PASS NEW DELHI

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PARM, PFOR, BG

SUBJECT: DINNER DISCUSSION WITH GENERAL ZIA

REF: STATE 287771

1. EVENING NOVEMBER 24 DCMLA MAJ GEN AND MRS. ZIAUR RAHMAN INVITED THE DCM, POLITICAL COUNSELOR AND ME, TOGETHER WITH OUR WIVES, TO A "GET ACQUAINTED" DINNER AT THEIR RESIDENCE IN THE ARMY CANTONMENT. OTHER GUESTS INCLUDED MAJ GEN AND MRS ERSHAD, DEPUTY CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF (NUMBER TWO IN THE ARMY), DCMLA AIR VICE MARSHAL AND MRS MAHMOOD, AND BRIG GEN AND MHS. DASTIGIR, CG OF THE BANGLADESH RIFLES (BORDER SECURITY FORCES UNDER THE HOME AFFAIRS MINISTRY). THE ATMOSPHERE WAS INFORMAL AND FRIENDLY.

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2. AT THE OUTSET, ZIA CONDUCTED ME TO A SOFA, SAT ME DOWN AND BEGAN TALKING. IN AN HOUR-LONG DISCUSSION, WE RANGED WIDELY OVER MAJOR ASPECTS OF BANGLADESH'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, FOOD-GRAIN STORAGE, FAMILY PLANNING, TRANSPORTATION, AND OTHERS), BUT IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT ZIA HAD MILITARY MATTERS FOREMOST IN HIS MIND. HE REVIEWED AGAIN THE PROBLEMS BANGLADESH FACES AS A RESULT OF WHAT HE CLEARLY REGARDS AS HOSTILE ACTIONS BY INDIA AND PROBED ONCE AGAIN ON WAYS IN WHICH WE MIGHT -- WITHIN OUR PRESENT CONSTRAINTS -- HELP STRENGTHEN HIS DEFENSE FORCES.

3. TO ENSURE THAT HE GOT AN ACCURATE ACCOUNT, I REVIEWED WITH HIM IN DETAIL THE RESULTS OF THE MOST RECENT MEETING IN WASHINGTON BETWEEN UNDER SECRETARY HABIB, ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATERTON AND ADMIRAL KHAN (REFTEL). I SAID THAT WE WANTED TO BE HELPFUL WITHIN THESE LIMITATIONS BUT DID NOT BELIEVE CONCESSIONAL MILITARY AID TO BANGLADESH WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO STABILITY OF SOUTH ASIA OR SERVE THE INTERESTS OF EITHER OF US. ZIA LISTENED INTENTLY AND SAID HE UNDERSTOOD. WHILE HE OBVIOUSLY DOES NOT AGREE WITH OUR EVENHANDED APPROACH, SINCE HE BELIEVES INDIA IS THE AGGRESSOR, HE SAID BANGLADESH DID NOT WANT IN ANY WAY TO CREATE DIFFICULTIES FOR US OR BE AN EMBARRASSMENT. IT NEEDED OUR HELP AND COULD PUT IT TO GOOD USE BUT UNDERSTOOD -- EVEN THOUGH IT DID NOT AGREE WITH -- THE LIMITS ON WHAT WE COULD DO. ZIA RETURNED SEVERAL TIMES IN A MEASURED UNEMOTIONAL WAY TO THE DILEMMA HE FACES: HE SEES HIS NATION'S SECURITY DETERIORATING AND WANTS TO BOLSTER ITS INTERNAL DEFENSES, BUT AT THE SAME TIME TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL HE DOES NOT WANT TO DIVERT SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES FROM BANGLADESH'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS WHICH HE REGARDS AS CRUCIAL TO THE NATION'S VIABILITY.

4. ZIA WAS PLEASED THAT PROGRESS WAS BEING MADE TOWARD A GRANT MILITARY TRAINING PROGRAM FOR FY 78. HE SAID (AND QUCE MARSHAL MAHMOOD CONFIRMED) THAT THE MILITARY SERVICES ARE PUTTING TOGETHER A LIST OF TRAINING THEY PARTICULARLY NEED. I STRESSED THAT THIS LIST SHOULD BE SHORT, SINCE OUR PROGRAM WOULD BE MODEST, AND THAT THE

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REQUIREMENTS SHOULD BE PUT FORTH IN PRIORITY ORDER. ZIA AND MAHMOOD AGREED. ZIA ALSO MADE A STRONG PITCH FOR STARTING THE PROGRAM THIS FISCAL YEAR. COMMENT: WHILE I RECOGNIZE THE BUDGETARY LIMITATIONS, I HOPE WE CAN FIND THE RESOURCES TO GET SOMETHING GOING IN FY 77. WE WILL COMMENT ON THIS FURTHER WHEN WE SEE THE BDG LIST.

5. ZIA NOTED CAREFULLY MY COMMENTS CONCERNING AVAILABILITY

OF A HYDROGRAPHIC RESEARCH SHIP BUT MADE NO COMMENT. THIS MAY BE SOMETHING OF GREATER INTEREST TO ADMIRAL KHAN THAN TO ZIA. IN ANY EVENT, I TOLD ZIA WE WOULD HAVE A FIRM PROPOSAL FOR THEM WITHIN THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS.

6. I ALSO EXPLORED WITH ZIA IN GENERAL TERMS THE DESIRABILITY OF HAVING A MILITARY ATTACHE IN OUR EMBASSY. HE THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE HIGHLY DESIRABLE AND FORESAW NO POLITICAL PROBLEMS. HE NOTED THAT A NUMBER OF EMBASSIES IN DACCA HAD ATTACHES AT THE PRESENT TIME. I WILL FORWARD MY RECOMMENDATIONS ON THIS IN A SEPARATE MESSAGE WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS.

7. BEFORE WE BROKE UP, I ASKED ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE RECENT DECISION TO POSTPONE GENERAL ELECTIONS. AS USUAL, ZIA WAS CAUTIOUS IN DISCUSSING INTERNAL POLITICAL MATTERS. HE DID HOWEVER SAY THAT WHILE THE PUBLIC REACTION TO THE POSTPONEMENT WAS WIDELY POSITIVE, HE DID NOT PRECLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT THERE MIGHT BE SOME NEGATIVE BACKLASH. HE THOUGHT INDIA MIGHT TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION, BUT GIVEN THE SMALL SIZE OF THE PARTIES MOST LIKELY TO OBJECT TO THE POSTPONEMENT, HE FELT THE SITUATION COULD BE HANDLED WITHOUT SERIOUS DIFFICULTY. THE IMPORTANT THING, HE NOTED, IS THAT BANGLADESH AT LONG LAST SHOULD HAVE A PERIOD OF PEACE AND CALM TO CONCENTRATE ON INTERNAL CONSOLIDATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. COMMENT: I AGREE. MASTERS UNQUOTE ROBINSON

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